

Suffering

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

Job 1:1 (KJV) 

Obviously none of us like to suffer, however what I am discovering is that suffering for Christ is an honor bestowed on very few today. We need to look at our trials differently. Let me give you an example. Satan is not omnipresent so there is only so much he can do with his time. So when we are suffering for the sake of the kingdom it is because Satan considers us such a direct threat to his kingdom that he has taken time out of his day to deal with us.



And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

Job 1:8-11 (KJV) 

The book of Job gives us a unique glimpse into the ongoing dialog between Satan and God regarding His servants. Unlike unbelievers we have a hedge of protection around us. Satan must get permission from God before he afflicts a Christian in any way. Are you perfect in all your ways? I know I'm not. If Job was and God still allowed him to be afflicted how much more those of us who fall short of perfection?

How do the 'Stepford Christians' explain the book of Job? This is what I call those who walk around with a phony smile on their faces telling people not to judge others. Oh, I remember hearing many a sermon on judging. They have their little sayings, I remember one would say "Whenever you point a finger at someone else you have three pointing back at you", meaning the other three on your hand.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

1 Corinthians 6:2 (KJV) 

But what I discovered is that these sermons were often motivated by individuals not trying to dispense sound spiritual advice, but to cover their own sins. I was asked to leave the church I had grown up in because I witnessed the church administrator coming out of a peep show in Times Square, Manhattan. Only God can judge another person's heart but scripture clearly tells us to judge situations as best we can. Scripture also tells us to reprove and rebuke those who would pervert the gospel (**2 Timothy 4:2**  KJV).

Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

Luke 18:22 (KJV) 

What about the story of Lazarus and the rich man? These men who preach wealth and prosperity when we are given multiple examples that our wealth is supposed to be in Heaven are stains upon Christendom. What of the apostle Paul? He traveled the world of his day preaching the gospel and wrote half the New Testament. Was he a threat to Satan?

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 (KJV) 

Look at what our brother Paul endured and answer for yourself if Christians suffer. He tells us plainly that he was tormented by a demon and asked God intervene. So you know what God tells him? “My grace is sufficient for thee”! I know what I would have said: “Gee, thanks God. I'm out here busting my hump for you and you can't even get rid of some stupid demon who's tormenting me in my mind when I'm trying to get a little rest from doing your work?”

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7:57-60 (KJV) 

Paul by his own admission as a Pharisee had killed Christians. He (Saul) was in fact an eyewitness and accomplice in the martyrdom of Stephen. Can you imagine how often these events were replayed in his mind by this demon? This one was undoubtedly hand chosen by Satan for his ability to buffet the mind with agonizing thoughts. Those innocent faces must have haunted him every night.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

2 Corinthians 12:7 (KJV) 

But Paul knew the purpose for his suffering. Yes, he suffered through all of those physical trials, but he also knew that the worst of all were the attacks in his mind. What was Paul's Achilles heel? Pride. But God has just the remedy for that.

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

Romans 7:24 (KJV) 

As you can see all things do indeed work together for good in the life of a Christian. Because once we understand what utterly wretched creatures we really are we can never get puffed up by pride. Consider this: that messenger of Satan buffeting Paul may have actually been the only thing that kept him from falling! That demon made sure Paul never forgot. Are you suffering for Christ? If Paul's life is any indication we can measure a Christian by how much they suffer.

